

The scarf that binds

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Summary: It had become a tradition of sorts, Gray stealing the Dragon-slayer's scarf in order to drag him into brawls, but that all changes on the 7th of July and the Ice mage vows never to touch it again...Gratsu Fluff Week 2016. Day 4 Prompt: Scarf

The scarf that binds

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Used as part of Gratsu Fluff Week 2016

Day 4 Prompt: Scarf

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It wasn't an uncommon thing for the guild to see Gray making off with their resident Dragon-slayer's beloved scarf, in fact it had got to the point where the Ice mage would seize it a couple of times a week, as it was a guaranteed method of getting Natsu to fight with him. The Dragon-slayer who was usually oblivious to most things, would realise within seconds what was going on when the familiar fabric disappeared from its usual spot around his neck...immediately setting off after Gray with loud shouts of retribution, and they were usually descend into a strange form of tag around the guild which would inevitably turn into a brawl when Natsu caught up to the Ice mage. Despite the damage they caused, and the numerous telling offs and punishments they had received from both Gramps and Erza it had become something of a tradition, and the guild had more or less resigned itself to their shenanigans.

Therefore no one batted an eyelid when they saw Gray sneaking up behind an unusually quiet Natsu on the afternoon that tradition came to an end. The Dragon-slayer had been out of sorts for a couple of

days, and had rebuffed every attempt on Gray's behalf to draw him into conversation or a brawl. Therefore, no one was surprised when Gray had opted to go for a tried and tested method of getting Natsu out of his funk and into a brawl, and they made no effort to stop him when he snatched the scarf away from the Fire mage's neck.

"Come on Flamebrain!" Gray taunted as he darted to the far side of the hall, having well and truly learnt better than to stick around after taking the scarf...he'd wound up in the infirmary for days the last time he'd done it, and both he and Natsu had been stuck cleaning the guild hall for a week as punishment once he'd been released. Ignoring the exasperated sighs from Cana and Lisanna as they moved out of his path to avoid getting caught up in what everyone thought would be an inevitable fight, he came to an abrupt halt as it occurred to him that the usual angry shouts and threats that met his thieving were missing. Blinking he turned around, startled to see that Natsu had only just managed to get to his feet, and that the Dragon-slayer was now standing in the middle of the hall with his head bowed, bangs hiding his eyes from view. "Natsu?"

"Give it back..." Natsu's voice was barely above a whisper, but it seemed to carry clearly across the hall and Gray blinked at the request. After the first few times Natsu had refused to even bother asking for his scarf back, instead launching himself immediately into a counter attack and the change was making Gray feel uneasy. _Why isn't he acting like normal?_ Quickly he glanced at Cana and Lisanna who had paused, apparently also recognising that something was wrong, but when he shot them a questioning look they merely shrugged and shook their heads to show they didn't have a clue either.

"Natsu?" He settled for asking as he shifted his attention back to the Dragon-slayer, taking a couple of steps back towards the other boy and hoping that this wasn't a trick of some sort, his hands tightening around his prize in case Natsu tried to snatch it back. However, Natsu made no effort to move towards him, although he finally lifted his head to stare at Gray with stormy olive eyes, and the Ice mage had no idea what to make of the emotions swimming in the other's eyes. _Natsu...what's going on with you?_

"Please...give it back," Natsu pleaded, his gaze alternating between the scarf in Gray's hands and the Ice mage's face, with no hint of his usual determination or anger to be seen as he stretched out a searching hand, only to pale as the Ice mage responded by hugging the scarf against his chest and shaking his head defiantly. "Please..."

What the hell, Natsu? Gray demanded silently as he backed away, not having a clue what was going on or what he was meant to do. What he hadn't expected was for the wide, olive eyes that had been watching his every movement to suddenly fill with tears, followed by

"N-Natsu?" Gray found himself stumbling over his rival's name, coming to a halt and staring in disbelief and dawning horror at the tears that had begun to trickle down the Dragon-slayer's cheeks. _What the hell was going on?_ Natsu had refused to cry in front of the Ice mage since the day that they'd first learnt that he hadn't been able to read and write as well as the rest of them, and the Fire mage had stubbornly stuck to his word, disappearing off on his own the few times when he had needed to cry. So for him to be standing in the

middle of the guild, right in front of Gray and crying was as far from normal as it was possible to be. "Oi Natsu!" He could feel everyone's attention beginning to shift towards them, a tendril of fear running down his back as he remembered that Erza was around somewhere and he was surprised that she hadn't already appeared to tear strips out of him.

There was a small sniffle from the Dragon-slayer, and for a moment Gray entertained the hope that Natsu was trying to gather himself and they could get back to normal. Instead it felt like he had been encased in his own ice when a small wail bubbled up from the Dragon-slayer, and he began to cry in earnest, bawling in a way that none of them had ever seen him do so before. In between the heaving sobs they could make out breathless pleas for Gray to give him the scarf back, but Gray found himself unable to move, completely horrified at the sight of his rival seemingly coming undone at the seams over something they had done ridiculously often for the past few months. _Natsu...what...I don't understand... Why are you crying?_

"Gray give him the scarf!" The sharp voice made him jolt in surprise, turning to find that Erza had appeared beside him, a dark look in her eyes as she glared at him for a moment, although her expression softened as she turned her attention back to the Dragon-slayer. "Today isn't a good day to tease him...especially about his scarf," she added in a much gentler tone, and Gray blinked at her in confusion, following her gaze before his mouth dropped open as understanding slowly dawned as he realised that it was grief that he could see in Natsu's eyes ..._July...July 7__th__...the anniversary of Igneel's disappearance, how could I forget?_

In all honesty Natsu generally avoided mentioning that day, and the previous couple of years the day had only been marked by the Dragon-slayer's absence by the guild, and Gray had to fight back the urge to shout at him for coming in on this day of all daysâ€|and for not telling them. As much as he enjoyed their rivalry, there was no way he would have acted like this was a normal day if he'd known. However, looking at the weeping boy he felt his anger dying immediately, a lead weight forming in his stomach as his hands tightened around the scarf he was still clinging to. _I'm an idiotâ€|_ Taking a deep breath he quickly crossed the distance between them, struggling not to flinch when red-rimmed eyes traced his every movement.

"Here," he whispered as he reached the smaller boy, holding out the scarf, hoping that their audience wouldn't notice how much his hands were trembling. _This is my faultâ€|_ He was unsurprised when Natsu's hands shot out and snatched the scarf back, the Dragon-slayer's breath catching as he cradled the material for a moment, before attempting to wrap around his neck. However, his hands were trembling worse than Gray's and the Ice mage was moving before he'd even contemplated what he was going to do. Wary olive eyes shot to him and it was clear that the Fire mage was waiting for the other shoe to drop, yet he made no move to stop him as Gray carefully moved the Dragon-slayer's hands out of the way, carefully winding the scarf around his neck for him. "I'm sorry," Gray muttered as he hesitantly wrapped his arms around the sobbing Dragon-slayer once the scarf was in place, amazed that his rival was letting him so close when he had been the one to set this off. However, the moment he began to pull back at that thought, Natsu lunged forwards, wrapping his own arms

around the Ice mage and burying his face against Gray's chest as he burst into fresh tears. "Natsu!" The Ice mage whispered, silently swearing never to lay a finger on the scarf again, regardless of what the day was as he never wanted to see his rival reduced to this state ever again.

I'm so sorry!

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Six years later:

Gray shivered as he hunkered down at the back of the cave, cursing the fact that his bag and therefore his spare clothes were back at the inn...normally a half days walk away from where they were, but more like a full day at the moment as his ankle was currently propped up a rough mound of moss-covered rock, visibly swollen and the slightest movement was enough to send fire lashing through it. It was his own fault as well. They had been on their way back to town after dealing with the small bandit guild they had been sent to stop, when he had managed to slip on some damp rocks, spraining his ankle and slicing his hands up in the process before finishing the whole sorry mess by landing in the small brook they were crossing. _I'm an idiot..._he thought grumpily, before his gaze shifted across to where Natsu was attempting to round up some dry fire to make a proper fire.

The Dragon-slayer had been kind enough not to laugh at his clumsiness, and instead there had only been genuine concern as he hauled Gray up and out of the water, eventually resorting to sweeping the Ice mage up completely when they realised his ankle couldn't bear his weight. Despite his protests that he could still walk, Gray hadn't been able to put much effort into freeing himself, and instead had found himself curling closer to the Dragon-slayer's warmth as he began to shiver. Apparently even being an Ice mage wasn't enough to protect him after a dip in a mountain brook, and he'd scowled as he realised that his clothes were soaked through.

It had been Natsu that had recalled the cave they'd passed that morning, and he'd carried Gray there without a word of complaint, even going so far as to lend the Ice mage his vest once they were settled so that he could sling Gray's soaking shirt over a nearby tree branch to dry whilst trying to make a fire. Despite the semi-dry clothes, and the heat that Natsu constantly let off, Gray was still freezing and he grimaced as his teeth began to chatter. _Seriously...an Ice mage feeling the cold..._He might have laughed if the situation wasn't so irritating, and he was so distracted by his discomfort and irritation that he nearly jumped a mile in the air when Natsu suddenly appeared in front of him, a concerned frown forming as he studied him for a moment.

"Here," Natsu murmured, reaching up and unwinding his scarf, before gently wrapping it around Gray's neck instead, his hands lingering on the material for a moment before he visibly forced himself to take a step back. "It should help keep you a little warmer...the wood here isn't going to catch fire anytime soon."

"But..." Gray protested weakly, unable to recall a time when Natsu had willingly parted from his beloved scarf since the day that he had inadvertently made the Dragon-slayer cry, and he automatically

reached up with the intention of taking it off. They had enough to deal with right now without Natsu having to feel anxious about his keepsake from Igneel, however, he froze when warm hands came to rest on top of his, stopping him mid action and he found himself staring into worried olive eyes.

"Just take it," Natsu ordered quietly, and Gray couldn't stop the smile that crept across his face as he stared at the Fire mage, especially when Natsu's cheeks turned a soft pink under the attention before the Dragon-slayer glanced awkwardly to the side as he muttered. "I don't want you falling ill on me..."

"Natsu..." Gray couldn't stop smiling, and ignoring the pain that it caused him he leant forward and grasped the Dragon-slayer's chin and tilted it until Natsu was meeting his gaze once more. The depth of the concern underlain with warm affection that he could see in the other teen's eyes, warmed him far more than the scarf around his neck, and after the slightest hesitation he leant forward and pressed his lips gently across Natsu's. The Fire mage stiffened for a moment, but made no move to escape, the pink in his cheeks darkening to a bright red even as he finally responded to the kiss and Gray couldn't stop himself from chuckling at the sight when he pulled back. Seeing the flash of irritation in Natsu's eyes over being laughed at, he leant forward and pressed a chaste kiss to the end of the Dragon-slayer's nose before letting his forehead come to rest against Natsu's as he breathed a quiet. "Thank you." _Thank you for forgiving me for what I did back then...for being here with me right now...and for loving me._

"You're welcome."

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A/N: This was meant to be a short drabbleâ€¦it grewâ€¦Anyway, this was written for animegaysarecanon on Tumblr / PearlTurtle on AO3 for their request for more Gratsu. I also saw your post about your headcanons, and loved the one about Gray stealing Natsu's scarf until he made him cry...so here you are ^-^

End
file.